

Research Article

Emotional Distance and Decision Making among Academic Staff of Selected Universities in Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to examine empirically the effect of emotional distance and organizational culture on decision-making behavior of academic staff of selected public universities in Edo State, Nigeria. This study employed a cross-sectional survey design, as it captured the views of the specific population at a particular point in time. The study population consist of all academic staff of three selected public universities in Edo State namely; University of Benin, Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma and Edo State University Uzairue. The three universities selected are a mixture of state and federal universities. Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire, from a sample of 443 academic staff. Out of this total number of questionnaire administered, 422 of the response were usable and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis with the aid of SPSS version 26.0. The findings show that psychological distance and social distance significantly and negatively influence decision making behavior among academic staff; meaning that it reduces academic staff commitment to organizational governance process. Findings revealed that organizational culture significantly and positively influence decision making; this indicates that a participatory, supportive and transparent institutional climate improves academic staff involvement. These findings establish the importance of psychological involvement and organizational culture on an effective governance within higher education institutions. This study therefore recommends an application of emotionally intelligent leadership approach and fostering of institutional cultures that promote fairness, supportiveness, inclusion, transparency and participation of staff.

Keywords: decision-making; emotional distance; psychological distance; social distance; organizational culture

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1. Introduction

Increasingly, decision making in academia is viewed as a complex, multi-faceted process that is influenced by cognitive and structural factors, as well as emotional and relational issues. One of the latest intervening variables being studied is the impact of emotional distance, which is defined as the affective detachment or absence of feeling connection with and to the environment where decision making occurs (Pütz, 2025). This construct can further be broken down into two main sub dimensions; psychological distance where an individual does not feel connected, either cognitively, to institutional goals, decisions, or leadership; and social distance where an individual does not feel connected, socially, to the organization as it relates to the interpersonal relationships, social standing or familiarity between stakeholders in the institution.

Hierarchical, bureaucratic and usually non transparent decision-making processes in the Nigerian universities create the context for the broadening of both psychological and social distance (Mesagan & Twinomurizi, 2025). As a result, for example, psychological distance can be engendered when academics do not feel aligned with the objectives of the university, or are shut out from the decision-making processes or cannot link personal goals and values to institutional goals. At the same time, social distance, or the perceived closeness between an individual and institutional objectives or stakeholders is further deepened through strict administrative policies, rank-related barriers to close interdepartmental and interpersonal interactions as well as absence of interactive exchanges among people at different

organizational levels (Ayanwoye et al., 2025).

It is this detachment from an affective perspective, based on these two sub dimensions that could lead to the framing and perception of institutional decisions, and which affects implementation. The author feels that through these sub-dimensions, emotional distance has the effect of reducing collegial interaction, discouraging participation of academics in the governance process and causing indifference to the outcome of decision-making processes in the institution (Adeleke et al., 2025). Moreover, institutional factors such as persistent underfunding, workload intensification, obscure career advancement opportunities and instability in leadership exacerbate this emotional distance at both the individual psychological and social levels of relationship to the institution (Nash, 2019; Olaniyan, 2025).

The influence of pervasive emotional distance to the detriment of both rational and participative decision making with consequences such as poor morale, inhibited creativity, lack of innovation and inefficient implementation of decisions is increasingly being studied in Nigerian universities (Falola et al., 2020). While psychological distance has been related to academic staff's withdrawal from long term organizational goals and visions, poor social distance to decisions can be explained as involving distrust and low social relation, low levels of interaction between employees, and aversion to challenge and influence across existing power relations among those involved in decisions (Surakat, 2025; Babu, 2024).

Though there has been increasing attention to emotional aspects of Organizational Behavior, there are minimal empirical studies in Nigeria that investigated the influence of emotional distance and the two dimensions of psychological and social distance in the study of academic decision-making processes. These omissions in the empirical literature are particularly evident in specific contexts, such as Edo State where universities are currently experiencing transitional reforms in the areas of governance and management (Avendaño et al., 2022). As Falade et al. (2025) noted, the inclusion of both emotional and relational variables is key in the understanding of governance and its impact on building emotionally intelligent leaders and responsive and involving decision-making cultures.

Despite considerable literature regarding decision making with affective factors like trust, emotional intelligence and engagement being investigated in international settings (Mugabekazi et al., 2026; Ang'ana et al., 2023), most research studies in Nigeria have only focused on the structural or administrative factors in organizational behavior or academia and the affective or relational underpinning aspects of academic engagement and decision-making are neglected, possibly because psychological and social distance can serve as a silent depressant of motive or expression of dissenting voices to the benefit of top officials within academia (Mbah et al., 2025).

Thus, the research gap is in the current study which explores the relationship between emotional distance and academic decision making among academic staff of some universities in Edo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) examine the influence of psychological distance on decision-making among academic staff in selected universities in Edo State; (2) study the effect of social distance on decision-making among academic staff in selected universities in Edo State; (3) investigate the relationship between organizational culture and emotional distance in shaping decision responsiveness among academic personnel.

2. Literature Review

In an academic institution, psychological distance from an organization, the workplace, colleagues and supervisors mean feeling detached and alienated emotionally. This reflects an institution's lack of interest and participation in its decisions as well as suspicion about its management, which has been exacerbated by the current workload, lack of autonomy, and the emotional exhaustion of staff (Ahmadi & Naderi Mayvan, 2025). The feelings of psychological distance were found to be closely tied to institutional loyalty, participation in decision making and the lack of collegiality and academic freedom that hinder the decision-making process among academic staff (Ader et al., 2025). Academic staff members exhibiting psychological distance have withdrawn behaviors, including non-communication, lack of interest and resistance toward the organization's functioning, which contradicts the fundamental concepts of academic freedom and collegiality in institutions of higher learning.

This kind of behavior will result in social alienation and segregation, as academic departments may lack cohesion and joint strategic initiatives since communication is weak among them (Ader et al., 2025). This feeling stems from poor communication, a sense of exclusion and increasing inertia (Olearczyk et al., 2026). Furthermore, low institutional trust,

a lack of clear roles, and unsolved interpersonal conflicts among employees can contribute to their feeling psychologically distant, which compromises their contribution to the institution's decision-making processes (Fukukura et al., 2013).

Psychological distance in the workplace refers to the level of cognitive estrangement between an employee and an issue. Academic staff feel this phenomenon in institutions of higher learning when they perceive issues as unrelated to them, feel alienated, and believe their contributions are neither needed nor valuable to the processes taking place in the institution (Chen & Li, 2018). This issue stems from hierarchical organizational structures lacking transparency and minimal staff involvement in strategic planning, thereby resulting in employees feeling no sense of ownership and consequently having a lack of motivation.

Marstand et al. (2025) research indicates that it can lead to a decrease in the level of urgency of institutional problems due to the impact of these phenomena on how academic staff think, as those with psychological distance have less ability to respond quickly and proactively to decision-making tasks. This also reduces employees' loyalty to the institution because of the discrepancy between leadership and staff members' thoughts and visions (Fukukura et al., 2013), and research suggests that it is often through lack of emotional connection that faculty members are demotivated to share innovative ideas and facilitate the progress of an institution, thus hindering decision-making processes and creating institutional inertia.

Drawing on the reviewed literature, decision-making behavior among academic staff appears to be shaped not only by formal institutional structures but also by the degree of psychological and social connectedness that staff experience within their institutions. Psychological distance may weaken identification with institutional goals and reduce willingness to participate in decision-making, while social distance may limit communication, trust, and meaningful interaction between academic staff, colleagues, and university leadership. At the same time, organizational culture provides the broader institutional environment within which these relationships develop, with participatory, transparent, and supportive cultures potentially promoting greater staff engagement in decision-making. Although previous studies provide theoretical and empirical support for these relationships, evidence within the context of Nigerian higher education, particularly universities in Edo State, remains limited. Accordingly, this study empirically examines the relationships among psychological distance, social distance, organizational culture, and decision-making behavior through the hypotheses presented below.

H01: There is no significant relationship between psychological distance and decision-making among academic staff of selected universities in Edo State.

In a work setting, social distance refers to how closely employees and managers or colleagues interact based on differences in organizational rank, friendship bonds, and institutional affiliation (Kokubun & Yamakawa, 2021). It implies that, to a certain extent, institutional employees have minimal interaction with leaders because of their hierarchical difference, thereby fostering low confidence in the institution's leaders and decreasing the willingness of academic staff to participate freely in discussions and decision-making processes (Chen & Li, 2018). Beyond mentorship, interactions may not take place among academic staff, which could decrease peer learning, organizational cohesion, and promote fear of reprisal for criticizing the institution and giving feedback to leadership, thereby increasing the level of support for the decision-making process and the desire to contribute and comply with the decisions made (Usmani et al., 2022).

H02: There is no significant relationship between social distance and decision-making among academic staff of selected universities in Edo State.

The factors influencing decision-making in academic institutions are the organizational structure, its leadership and how deeply staff members are involved (Isirabahenda et al., 2026). While institutions of higher learning advocate shared governance, Nigerian higher institutions suffer from organizational rigidity and worker detachment (Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021). Additionally, the emotions of individuals influence the way they think and engage in analytical tasks thereby fostering either compliance without deep analysis or the inhibition of the staff's self-expression (Lightfoot et al., 2025). Staff members who are emotionally disengaged feel less need to get involved in institutional decision-making processes as they have no sense of ownership of any decisions made (Mamatkulova, 2025). In addition, researchers find that alienated employees may miss opportunities to advance the institution's goals due to their tendency to fail to identify opportunities for improvement and lack of confidence in their colleagues, therefore unable to establish the required level of trust that encourages creativity and innovation (Akindipe, 2025). Emotional disengagement can contribute to a decreasing

interest in institutional development and cause staff members to become apathetic and compliant rather than motivated and involved (Isirabahenda et al., 2026). Therefore, the study hypothesis is that employees with emotionally intelligent leaders will increase institutional commitment and effective decision making.

Organizational culture greatly influences both the enablement and disablement of psychological distance; a highly interactive and transparent work culture may lead to strong interpersonal connectedness among employees, boosting their morale (Tong et al., 2025) while a rigid culture characterized by high hierarchical stratification and minimal communication leads to alienation (Gallo & Felipe, 2025). Academic freedom and inclusive decision-making processes enhance the reduction of psychological distance (Mamatkulova, 2025) but being systematically excluded from discussions and committee meetings may fuel alienation and foster distrust in the leaders and the organization (Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021). Close congruence between organizational values and employees' perceptions may narrow the gap between institutional expectations and employees' actions; institutions with clearly defined values that respect academic achievements and provide safe avenues for academic staff to communicate with each other are likely to have a more engaged workforce (Olearczyk et al., 2026).

H03: There is no significant relationship between organizational culture and emotional distance among academic staff of selected universities in Edo State.

This study builds its foundation on the affective events theory (AET) developed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), which posits that events at work have the capacity to influence attitudes and consequently behavior through intermediate affective events at work. For instance, the non-attendance at the meeting the employee was invited to, an unfavorable appraisal or non-recognition of any individual effort will provoke negative affective reactions. Academic institutions similarly believe that faculty members' exclusion from meetings, lack of transparency in a hierarchical structure, and unjust evaluation practices create employee alienation and lead to non-commitment and passive compliance with the decision-making process of the institution (Isirabahenda et al., 2026). The AET has also been adapted for studies related to academic staff and decision-making; a previous study found that academic staff who feel their efforts are recognized become more loyal and participate in decision-making (Mamatkulova, 2025) but negative and persistent experiences at work that cause emotional distress hinder emotional attachment and the will to participate in decision making (Isirabahenda et al., 2026).

The findings demonstrate that psychological distance, social distance, and organizational culture represent interconnected factors that may shape how academic staff engage with institutional decision-making processes. Psychological and social distance may weaken staff involvement by reducing their sense of identification, trust, communication, and connection with colleagues and institutional leadership, whereas a supportive organizational culture may create conditions that encourage participation, openness, and commitment to institutional decisions. Despite growing scholarly attention to these factors, their relationships with decision-making behavior remain insufficiently examined within the context of Nigerian higher education. The hypotheses developed from the literature therefore provide the empirical basis for assessing the extent to which these factors influence decision-making behavior among academic staff in the selected universities in Edo State.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a survey research design, a method of gathering information about a particular population at a single point in time. This technique is convenient, relatively cheap and allows for data to be gathered efficiently (Babbie, 2020; Ofobruku, 2022). All academic staff of selected public universities in Edo State-University of Benin, Ambrose Alli University and Edo State University Uzairue-participated in this study. The three institutions were selected due to differences in institutional culture, work environment management, and the way the decision-making processes were operated (Ofobruku et al., 2019; Babu, 2024). The total population of academic staff across the three selected institutions from 2024 directory was 2,318, out of which a sample size of 337 for the research was determined by using the formula developed by Yamane (1973) at a confidence level of 95% and 5% margin of error, given that the target population is finite.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)} \quad (a)$$

where n = sample size; N = population = 2318; e = level of significance = 0.05

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)} = \frac{2318}{1+2318(0.05^2)} = 341 \quad (b)$$

A 30% over-sample was taken after Israel (2016) in order to include those who would not respond to the study, bringing the sample size to 443.

The sampling method employed was a multistage sampling method. Initially the sample was stratified according to university. Sampling was proportional to the number of academic staffs according to stratified sampling formula as stated in (Gupt, et al, 2021), where a reasonable sample size was achieved. Following this the sample was selected from the different universities by convenience sampling. Convenience sampling made accessing staff through meeting places and staff room very quick, thus making administration of questionnaire easier. Four hundred and forty-six academic staffs (3 universities) were the sample size for the study with a breakdown across three universities in Edo state in proportion to the number of staff as follows; 184, 147, 115, from university of Benin (biggest of the three), Ambrose Alli University and Edo state University Uzairue respectively.

A well-structured, self-administered questionnaire was developed in order to test the variables of emotional distance and decision-making behavior of academic staffs. It contained three parts; Part A: Demographics (age, academic rank and length of service); Part B: Emotional distance scale; Part C: Decision making behavior scale. Emotional distance was measured by items developed from the organizational disengagement inventory (Brown & Leigh, 1996) as adapted by Vega Galvn et al., (2025), in which measures for cognitive and emotional distancing was evaluated. Decision making behavior was measured by adapted items from Mamatkulova (2025) and Olearczyk et al. (2026) in which participatory behavior, autonomy and institution trust were analyzed. Items within these scales were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

Content validity of the questionnaire was tested when it was submitted to three senior academic experts in the field of organizational behavior and psychology for content validity testing. Pilot study was conducted with 25 academic staff not from within Edo state, the results from which showed internal consistencies Cronbach’s alpha, =0.86 for emotional distance, and=0.82 for decision making behavior scale.

The gathered data were analyzed using statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. A series of statistical tests were conducted; Descriptive statistic was employed first to summarize the demographic variables and means scores for each construct. Secondly, the test of correlation was done to evaluate multicollinearity of research variables and their level of relationship. Thirdly, multiple regression was conducted to test hypotheses, and establish how emotional distance influences the decision-making behavior of academic staffs, considering organization culture. 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$) was used for all tests.

4. Results

The 443 copies of questionnaires distributed all to academic staff were returned with 422 valid, making the response rate 95.3%. The response rates from all three universities were also almost the same; 95.3% from University of Benin, Ambrose Alli University respectively, and Edo State University Uzairue with 95.2%. This indicated that the questionnaire was reliable and the population of academic staff was adequate.

This section summarizes the administration of the questionnaires and presents some demographic features of the respondents. These include sex, age, academic rank, and years of service. The results are detailed in table 1. It shows that there are 204 males (48.3% of the sample) and 218 females (51.7% of the sample) within the academic staff. Thus, there is a slight female dominance. The 31-40 years age group recorded the highest proportion of the sample (167, 39.6%), followed by those aged 41-50 years (136, 32.2%). Age group above 50 has 19.7% while those 30 years and below have 8.5% of the sample. Majority of the sample has the position of Lecturer I (150, 35.5%) followed by Senior Lecturers and above (146, 34.6%). There are 87 respondents (20.6%) that hold the position of Lecturer II and 39 respondents (9.2%) who are Graduate Assistants. Thus, a higher proportion of academic staff are in the mid to higher academic position ranks. The years of experience show that the largest proportion of staff are within the 6-10 years range (163, 38.6%) followed by those 0-5 years range (99, 23.5%), then those 11-15 years range (88, 20.9%) and finally above 16 years range (72, 17.1%).

Table 1. Respondents' demographic information.

Demographics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	204	48.3
	Female	218	51.7
	Total	422	100.0
Age	30 and below	36	8.5
	31-40	167	39.6
	41-50	136	32.2
	Above 50	83	19.7
	Total	422	100.0
Academic rank	Graduate Assistant	39	9.2
	Lecturer II	87	20.6
	Lecturer I	150	35.5
	Senior Lecturer and above	146	34.6
	Total	422	100.0
Years of service	0-5 years	99	23.5
	6-10 years	163	38.6
	11-15 years	88	20.9
	16 years and above	72	17.1
	Total	422	100.0

Table 2 displays the Pearson correlation matrix of variables critical to the study. There appears to be a negative correlation between decision-making behavior (DMB) and both psychological distance (PD) ($r = -.374$) and social distance (SD) ($r = -.356$) between the individuals and the institution which means the further away the individual feels from the institutional mechanisms involved in decision-making, the worse the decision-making behavior of academics. However, there is a positive correlation between DMB and OC ($r = .437$) which means the better the organizational culture, the more appropriate the decision-making. The correlation between PD and SD is moderately positive ($r = .518$) indicating that an individual feels further away from the institution intellectually as well as socially in terms of their colleagues. PD is negatively correlated with OC ($r = -.342$) and so is SD ($r = -.329$) indicating that the better the OC, the less likely the individual is to feel distant from the institution cognitively and socially.

Table 2. Pearson correlation.

Variable	DMB	PD	SD	OC
Decision-making behavior (DMB)	1	-0.374	-0.356	0.437
Psychological distance (PD)	-0.374	1	0.518	-0.342
Social distance (SD)	-0.356	0.518	1	-0.329
Organizational culture (OC)	0.437	-0.342	-0.329	1

According to the regression analysis below (table 3), psychological distance ($= -0.189$, $p < 0.05$) and social distance ($= -0.167$, $p < 0.05$) have negative and statistically significant relationships with decision-making behavior of academic staff of universities in Edo State, indicating that a decrease in cognitive and relational segregation will promote participatory and collaborative decision-making behaviors. Organizational culture ($= 0.292$, $p < 0.05$) also has a positive and statistically significant relationship with the decision-making behavior of academic staff, implying that a better institutional culture can improve decision-making effectiveness. The R-squared value of 0.312 indicates that the three independent variables account for 31.2% of the variation in the decision-making behavior of academic staff. The F-statistic value of 37.180 and the significance level of 0.000 suggest that the model is statistically significant. All tolerance values are greater than 0.70, while VIF values are less than 2, indicating the absence of multicollinearity. The Durbin-Watson value of 2.614 shows no autocorrelation. In general, H01, H02, and H03 are rejected, implying that psychological distance, social distance, and organizational culture all have a significant impact on the decision-making behavior of academic staff.

Table 3. Model estimation.

Independent	Unstandardized	Standardized	t	Sig.	Collinearity	Outcomes of
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variable	coefficients		coefficient			statistics		hypotheses testing
	B	Std. error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF	
(Constant)	2.032	0.168	—	12.10	0.000	—	-	-
Psychological distance (PD)	-0.163	0.045	-0.189	-3.62	0.000	0.721	1.486	Reject H01
Social distance (SD)	-0.141	0.046	-0.167	-3.07	0.002	0.715	1.486	Reject H02
Organizational culture (OC)	0.258	0.050	0.292	5.16	0.000	0.738	1.486	Reject H03

Note: R2 = 0.298; Adj R2 = 0.287; F-Statistic = 34.910 F-statistic (Prob) = 0.000; Durbin-Watson = 2.609; number of observations = 422; dependent variable = DMB

Therefore, the results provide consistent empirical evidence that psychological distance, social distance, and organizational culture are significantly associated with the decision-making behavior of academic staff in the selected universities. Both psychological and social distance showed significant negative effects, indicating that greater cognitive and relational detachment is associated with lower levels of participation and engagement in institutional decision-making. In contrast, organizational culture demonstrated a significant positive effect, suggesting that a supportive institutional environment is associated with more effective decision-making behavior. The regression model was statistically significant and explained a meaningful proportion of the variance in decision-making behavior, while the diagnostic statistics indicated no substantial problems of multicollinearity or autocorrelation. Consequently, the three null hypotheses (H01, H02, and H03) were rejected, providing empirical support for the relationships proposed in the study.

5. Discussion

Based on the results, there are three main conclusions concerning the decision-making behavior of academic staff at selected universities in Edo State. The study found that psychological distance negatively and significantly influences decision-making behavior ($= -0.189, p < 0.05$), suggesting that staff alienated from institutional aims, leadership, or vision are less likely to participate effectively. This aligns with Falola et al.'s (2020) observation of academic staff withdrawal due to psychological, emotional, and intellectual separation from organizational goals and colleagues, and their exclusion from strategic decision-making. Such separation leads to low morale and weak cohesion, resulting in superficial compliance rather than genuine engagement (Omar Ahmed et al., 2024). Psychological separation can stem from differing beliefs or differing views on institutional future (Surakat, 2025), and often suppresses innovation and critical views (Mbah et al., 2025). Therefore, H01 is rejected.

Social distance also negatively and significantly affects decision-making behavior ($= -0.167, p < 0.05$). This implies that academic staff who perceive administrators as socially or hierarchically distant are less responsive to decision-making issues. According to Ogundipe et al. (2025), interpersonal distance in organizations arises from lack of relationships and communication, high power distance, and administrative hierarchy, which can discourage faculty and student participation in decision-making for their own welfare and institutional development. Gase et al. (2017) found that less cordial relationships between students and university administration negatively impact decision-making commitment, fearing reprimand, while Babu (2024) noted that social distance hinders innovation and fosters a "culture of silence." H02 is therefore rejected.

Organizational culture positively and significantly influences decision-making behavior ($= 0.292, p < 0.05$). The way an institution is governed in terms of norms, values, rules, policies, and relationships significantly impacts academic staff's willingness to make decisions. Falade et al. (2025) state that a strong organizational culture of trust and respect enhances participative decision-making, as employees feel more involved and enthusiastic when fairness and respect prevail. Babu (2024) adds that a strong institutional culture fosters employee loyalty, creativity, and confidence in the organization's success. Consequently, H03 is rejected.

The negative relationship between psychological distance and decision-making behavior found in this study is consistent with recent research emphasizing the importance of employees' perceived psychological connection with their work environment. Ahmadi and Naderi Mayvan (2025), for example, demonstrated that psychological distance is closely related to leadership behavior and employee effectiveness, indicating that employees'

perceptions of closeness to or distance from organizational actors can shape their responses to workplace demands. Although their study was conducted in a remote-work context rather than higher education, the underlying mechanism is relevant to the present findings: perceived distance can influence how employees interpret organizational situations and determine the extent to which they engage with them. In the university context, academic staff who perceive institutional objectives, leadership priorities, or governance processes as psychologically remote may consequently view participation in decision-making as less personally meaningful. The present results therefore extend this broader evidence to academic institutions by demonstrating that psychological detachment is associated with weaker decision-making behavior among university staff.

This interpretation is also supported by recent higher education research demonstrating the consequences of management practices for academics' engagement with institutional processes. Bamforth et al. (2025) found that university management decision-making can affect academic educators' wellbeing, their own decision-making, and their capacity to respond to organizational change. Their findings indicate that institutional decisions are not experienced by academic staff merely as administrative actions but may influence their sense of autonomy, competence, and capacity to act. Viewed alongside the present results, this suggests that psychological distance may develop partly when academic staff perceive limited personal influence over institutional processes or experience a mismatch between management decisions and their professional priorities. Such detachment may subsequently weaken the willingness to contribute actively to decision-making, thereby transforming participation from substantive engagement into passive acceptance or procedural compliance.

The finding regarding social distance provides a complementary relational explanation of academic staff participation. Universities are inherently collaborative organizations in which decision-making depends on communication and interaction among academics, departmental leaders, administrators, committees, and other institutional actors. Consequently, hierarchical or interpersonal separation may restrict the exchange of information and reduce opportunities for academic staff to express concerns, question proposals, or contribute alternative perspectives. Recent work on organizational change in higher education similarly emphasizes that inadequate stakeholder engagement, weak communication, and insufficient integration of participatory governance can create resistance and undermine institutional change, whereas meaningful stakeholder involvement strengthens implementation processes (Singun, 2025). The negative effect of social distance identified in the present study can therefore be understood not simply as a problem of interpersonal relationships, but as a potential governance constraint: where relational barriers are stronger, the knowledge and professional expertise of academic staff may be less effectively incorporated into institutional decisions.

Importantly, psychological and social distance should not be interpreted as entirely separate organizational phenomena. The correlation between psychological and social distance ($r = .518$) indicates that the two dimensions are moderately related, suggesting that cognitive and relational forms of detachment may coexist and potentially reinforce one another. Academic staff who experience limited interaction with university leadership, strong status barriers, or exclusion from important institutional discussions may gradually become less psychologically identified with institutional priorities. Conversely, employees who no longer perceive institutional objectives as relevant or personally meaningful may become less motivated to communicate, collaborate, or participate in institutional relationships. While the cross-sectional design of the present study does not permit conclusions about the direction of these relationships, the findings suggest that emotional distance may operate as a multidimensional experience in which psychological disengagement and relational separation jointly characterize weakened connections between academic staff and their institutions.

The positive effect of organizational culture is particularly noteworthy when considered alongside recent research on decision-making in academia. Munir et al. (2025), in a large study involving academic institutions in Pakistan, found that academic decision-making efficiency was shaped by a combination of behavioral and institutional factors, including emotional intelligence, organizational support, academic environment, role seniority, job satisfaction, and organizational culture. Their analysis identified organizational culture as an important contextual condition influencing relationships between individual and organizational factors and decision-making efficiency. Although the institutional and national contexts differ, their findings reinforce the present study's conclusion that academic decision-making cannot be explained exclusively through individual characteristics. Rather, the cultural environment within which decisions are discussed and implemented can facilitate or constrain effective

participation.

The relative magnitude of the effects observed in the present study further strengthens this interpretation. Organizational culture produced the largest standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.292$), compared with psychological distance ($\beta = -0.189$) and social distance ($\beta = -0.167$). Although differences between regression coefficients should be interpreted cautiously, this pattern suggests that the institutional environment may be especially important in explaining variations in academic staff decision-making behavior. A culture characterized by transparency, fairness, openness to dialogue, recognition of academic expertise, and opportunities for meaningful participation may provide staff with stronger reasons to engage with institutional decisions. Conversely, highly hierarchical or exclusionary cultures may reduce such engagement even where formal mechanisms for staff consultation exist. This interpretation is consistent with recent higher education research emphasizing that organizational culture can either support or impede institutional change and that communication, accountability, stakeholder engagement, and participatory governance are central to effective transformation in universities (Singun, 2025).

The correlation findings provide further evidence for viewing organizational culture as part of a broader relational environment rather than as an isolated predictor. Organizational culture was negatively correlated with both psychological distance ($r = -.342$) and social distance ($r = -.329$), indicating that more positive perceptions of institutional culture were associated with lower levels of both forms of distance. These associations do not demonstrate that organizational culture causes reductions in emotional distance, and the present research design does not test mediation. Nevertheless, the pattern is theoretically meaningful. It suggests that supportive institutional cultures tend to coexist with stronger psychological and relational connections between staff and their universities. Future research could therefore examine whether organizational culture acts as an antecedent, moderator, or mediating contextual mechanism in the relationship between emotional distance and decision-making behavior.

The findings also provide empirical support for interpreting academic decision-making through AET. This theory proposes that workplace experiences generate affective responses that subsequently influence employees' attitudes and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In academic institutions, exclusion from important meetings, limited access to information, lack of recognition, perceived unfairness, hierarchical communication, or repeated experiences of having one's views disregarded may function as affective workplace events. When such experiences accumulate, academic staff may become psychologically detached from institutional goals or socially distant from those responsible for governance. These affective and relational responses may then be reflected behaviorally in reduced participation, reluctance to contribute ideas, passive compliance, or withdrawal from institutional decision-making.

This theoretical interpretation is particularly relevant because emotional responses to organizational conditions may develop cumulatively rather than result from a single event. Recent extensions of AET emphasize that affective experiences can become persistent under continuing organizational conditions, with repeated ambiguity, constrained discretion, and ongoing interpersonal or procedural experiences producing cumulative emotional consequences. From this perspective, emotional distance among academic staff may reflect not simply reactions to isolated administrative decisions but the accumulated effect of repeated experiences with institutional leadership, communication practices, recognition, participation, and organizational fairness. This provides a useful explanation for why organizational culture and emotional distance are simultaneously associated with decision-making behavior: the culture establishes the recurring conditions under which staff interpret their institutional experiences, while psychological and social distance may represent important manifestations of how those experiences are internalized.

More broadly, the findings indicate that effective academic decision-making should not be conceptualized solely as a formal administrative process. Universities may establish committees, consultations, departmental meetings, and other mechanisms for shared governance, yet the effectiveness of these structures is likely to depend on whether academic staff feel psychologically connected to institutional goals, socially able to interact with decision-makers, and culturally supported in expressing their views. Formal participation without psychological identification or relational trust may produce compliance rather than genuine involvement. The results therefore highlight an important distinction between providing opportunities for participation and creating institutional conditions in which staff perceive such participation as meaningful, legitimate, and capable of influencing outcomes.

We may state that the findings position emotional distance as an important but underexplored dimension of academic governance and demonstrate that decision-making behavior emerges from the interaction between individual perceptions, interpersonal relationships, and the broader institutional environment. Psychological and social distance were both associated with weaker decision-making behavior, whereas organizational culture was associated with stronger engagement and emerged as the strongest predictor in the model. These results are broadly consistent with recent international evidence emphasizing the importance of psychological connectedness, stakeholder involvement, supportive management, and organizational culture in shaping employee and academic participation. At the same time, the study extends this body of knowledge by demonstrating these relationships within the context of public universities in Edo State, Nigeria, where empirical evidence on the emotional and relational dimensions of academic governance remains limited. The findings therefore suggest that improving university decision-making requires more than formal structural reform: it requires an institutional environment that reduces psychological and social barriers, strengthens trust and meaningful communication, and enables academic staff to experience themselves as active participants rather than distant recipients of institutional decisions.

6. Conclusions

This study examined the influence of psychological distance, social distance, and organizational culture on the decision-making behavior of academic staff in selected universities in Edo State, Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that both psychological and social dimensions of emotional distance are important factors associated with academic staff participation in institutional decision-making. Psychological distance had a significant negative relationship with decision-making behavior, indicating that academic staff who feel detached from institutional goals, leadership, and organizational processes are less likely to engage actively and meaningfully in decision-making. Similarly, social distance had a significant negative relationship with decision-making behavior, suggesting that hierarchical and interpersonal separation between academic staff, colleagues, and institutional leaders may constrain communication, trust, collaboration, and willingness to contribute to institutional decisions. In contrast, organizational culture had a significant positive relationship with decision-making behavior and demonstrated the strongest effect among the predictors examined. This finding emphasizes the importance of an institutional environment characterized by openness, fairness, support, effective communication, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

These findings show that effective university decision-making depends not only on formal governance structures but also on the psychological, relational, and cultural conditions within which academic staff participate. The results further indicate that psychological and social distance are interconnected dimensions of staff detachment and that more positive perceptions of organizational culture are associated with lower levels of both forms of distance. Thus, establishing formal mechanisms for staff participation may be insufficient if academic staff remain psychologically disconnected from institutional objectives or socially distant from those responsible for governance. The study therefore contributes to understanding academic governance by highlighting emotional distance as an important factor associated with decision-making behavior and by demonstrating the relevance of these relationships within the context of Nigerian higher education.

Based on the findings of the study and their implications for institutional governance and academic staff participation, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen decision-making processes in universities.

Firstly, university management should adopt proactive approaches to involve academic staff in strategic and institutional decision-making through ongoing consultation, communication, and open-door policies.

Secondly, measures should be implemented to foster a warm and approachable environment between administrators and academic staff, such as mentorship programs, collaborative projects, and informal discussions.

Thirdly, university administrations should improve the capacity and responsiveness of their managers to academic staff participation in decision-making by providing training on emotional intelligence and participative leadership.

As a result of some restraints and limitations of resource, this study could not investigate some other important academic institutions i.e. polytechnics, colleges of education and

innovative institutions in Nigeria. This study therefore recommended further research on the effect of emotional distance and decision making among academic staff of polytechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria. This will enable the results of this research to be generalized.

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